



DESIGN COMMISSION REVIEW HANDBOOK

Introduction and Contents

This handbook explains the Design Commission review process and the materials required for each review. The handbook contains the following sections:

1. Getting Started

These materials are the minimum information the Commission needs to begin the review of a project.

2. Project Phases and Commission Policies

This explains what the Commission evaluates and makes recommendations on at each phase of design. It also includes links to policies that guide reviews.

3. Presentation Guidelines

Please follow these formatting and submittal requirements to ensure a complete and thorough review.

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Commission Meeting Timeline

If your project is subject to Design Commission review, first contact Commission staff to set up an initial appointment to discuss your project. City-funded projects are sometimes not subject to Design Commission review. Staff can help you determine if your project is subject to Commission review. Depending on the scope and status of the project and the Commission schedule, the **first review** will occur about two or three months after submission of an application.

Three weeks prior to every Commission review of your project, Commission staff will hold a **prep meeting** with you. During this meeting you will present a draft of your presentation to receive feedback about its structure and content from staff and Commissioners. The purpose of the meeting is to make sure your presentation is complete in advance of your formal Commission meeting. Be prepared to submit this draft presentation either on a flash drive or by email.

Your **final presentation** is due in PDF format 8 days prior to the Commission meeting. These slides will be distributed to Commissioners as preview materials and posted with a DRAFT watermark to the public [Design Commission website](#). While the Commission understands this is a draft document, the expectation is that it reflects what will be presented at the Commission meeting.

The following timeline outlines the materials due prior to every Commission review:



1. GETTING STARTED

Submission of the following items will initiate a Commission review. Some materials on this list may be altered or revised following consultation with Commission staff. Submit these items electronically to SDC_Administration@seattle.gov prior to or at the time of your initial meeting with Commission staff.

All Projects

- Project address and location
- SDCI project number
- Project description including anticipated uses
- Vicinity map
- Site photos
- Site plan with two-foot contours and dimensions
- Zoning information
- Completed SEPA checklist or Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)
- Map of neighborhood context (surrounding nine-block area) including:
 - Iconic elements
 - Municipal facilities (e.g., community centers, fire stations, libraries, pump stations, power substations)
 - Transit stops and bicycle facilities
 - Parks, open spaces, and view corridors
 - Street classifications and types
 - Projects under construction or in pipeline
 - Overlap with planning efforts (e.g., Bicycle, Transit, and Pedestrian Master Plans; Streetscape Concept Plans; Neighborhood Plans; Major Institution Master Plans)

Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Projects

- Scope, budget, and schedule
- Proposed program elements
- Sustainability strategy overview
- Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) strategy overview
- Concept drawings, if available

Street and Alley Vacations

- Copy of a valid vacation petition from the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT); if submitted
- Square footage and dimensions of proposed vacation
- Analysis of development potential gained because of the vacation
- Copy of any Early Design Guidance materials, if available

Skybridges

- Recommendation from the Skybridge Review Committee
- Interior building plans showing skybridge access points
- Exterior perspectives showing view of skybridge in context with attached structures
- Elevations and details of skybridge

2. PROJECT PHASES

This section outlines the phases of review for CIP projects, street and alley vacations, and skybridges. The number and timing of reviews varies according to type, scope, and complexity of each project. You should discuss the scheduling of the first review at your initial meeting with Commission staff.

The descriptions below explain what the Commission evaluates at each phase of review for each project type. You should tailor your presentation materials to align with the information about each phase. Refer to the Presentation Guidelines section at the end of this handbook for additional details on how to format and submit presentation materials.

You can find more information on the policies that guide the Commission in their reviews via the links below.

- The City's [Sustainable Building and Site Policy](#), per [Resolution 31326](#)
- The City's [Race and Social Justice Initiative](#) (RSJI)
- The Commission's [Subcommittee Review Policy](#)
- The Commission's [Public Art Policy](#)
- The Commission's [Equity Policy](#)

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (CIP) PROJECTS

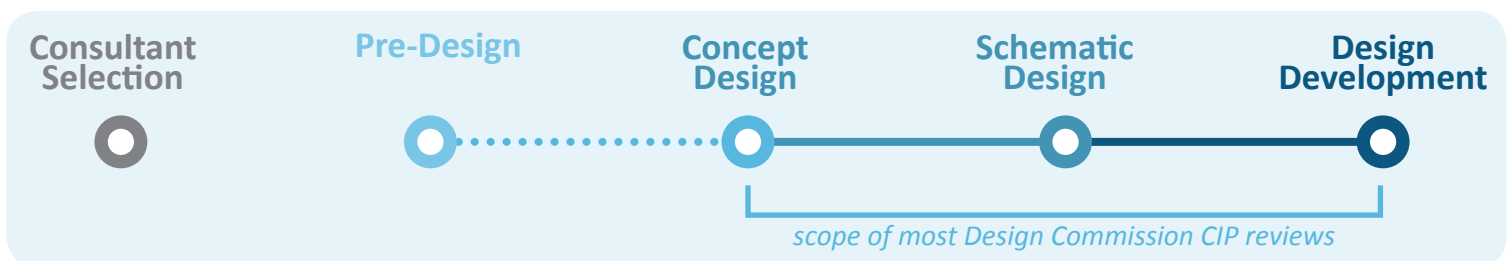
The Commission reviews Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects for City departments. CIP projects are City-funded, built on City property (including City-owned right-of-way), or require a City approval. Typical CIP projects include parks, fire stations, police stations, libraries, and other public facilities.

City departments identify CIP projects as part of the City's yearly budget adoption process. You can browse these projects in the City's most recent [CIP budget](#).

The City's code that established the Design Commission provides broad authority to review CIP projects:

No City capital improvement project shall be designed, placed under contract for design, or constructed without first being referred to the Commission for its review and recommendation.

The Commission reviews projects through the following distinct phases:



After the consultant selection phase, the Commission reviews most CIP projects three times: during the concept design (30% of final design), schematic design (60% of final design), and design development (90% of final design) phases. If the project is complex in size or its mission, the Commission may also review it at the pre-design (15% of final design) phase. In general, the review should occur prior to the end of the specified phase of design.

The Commission votes to approve a project at each phase. Multiple reviews may occur at a given phase if the Commission does not approve the project progressing to the next design phase.

For questions about how engineering, infrastructure, or transportation projects align with this phase schedule, contact Commission staff.

Every presentation throughout each step of the process should include the following to ensure a thorough review:

- Floor plans, elevations, and sections with dimensions
- Site circulation diagram
- Landscape elements
- Program elements
- Lighting
- Sustainability in building and site design
- Stormwater facilities/infrastructure
- Pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular facilities
- A summary of the approach toward equity, as reflected in the Commission's equity policy

The following sections explain in greater detail what the Commission evaluates at each phase of design for CIP projects and what additional materials are expected in the corresponding presentation.

Consultant Selection

Consultant selection for a CIP project can be crucial to its success. City departments developing a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) or Request for Proposal (RFP) for projects subject to Commission review should involve at least one Commissioner at the initial stages.

During the selection process, the Commission will recommend that you:

- Include preliminary design goals and objectives in the project scope
- Include sufficient design budgets and realistic schedules
- Invite submissions from a broad range of firms, including newly-established and minority- and women-owned firms
- Solicit firms with a record of, or potential for, design excellence
- Assess the firm's design expertise and values, its managerial competence, and its enthusiasm for the project

Pre-Design

A pre-design review occurs when you explore multiple alternatives for programming and siting. The Commission reviews the project goals, a roadmap for achieving them, and any opportunities and challenges you have identified. The presentation should include a thorough analysis of the project site and any relevant codes, plans, or design guidelines. You should outline your plan for community engagement and discuss how the project supports the goals of the City's Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI).

At the pre-design stage, the Commission evaluates and makes recommendations on:

- Overall project scope, budget, schedule
- Goals and objectives
- Design alternatives under consideration
- Exploration and analysis of site conditions, constraints, and opportunities
- Exploration and analysis of community and interdepartmental involvement and coordination
- Exploration of sustainability goals, challenges, and opportunities including options designed to meet the City's Sustainable Building and Site Policy
- Analysis of urban context (urban form, character, uses, transportation and open space networks, etc.)
- How your approach on equity is reflected in the design of public space or facilities

See the [October 15, 2015 Portage Bay Park](#) materials for a good example of a pre-design presentation.

Concept Design

At the concept design phase, the Commission evaluates the organization and function of the building and/or site. The review occurs when you have selected a preferred alternative and there is still time to change the project concept. At the concept design review, you should document the intended character and experiential qualities of the design. As the project progresses through the schematic design and design development phases, the initial concept presented at this review provides a reference point. If the Commission did not review the project at pre-design, you should address the items listed under Pre-Design during this phase.

At the concept design phase, the Commission evaluates and makes recommendations on:

- The preferred overarching design concept
- Scope and program
- Design response to site conditions, constraints, and opportunities
- Synthesis of and design response to community input
- Integration with the urban fabric
- Sizing and configuration of site program elements, building uses, circulation, scale, massing, and orientation
- Character of buildings and spaces
- Initial ideas for employing materials, plants, lighting, and artwork
- Development of approach towards sustainability, including options in site and building design that meet or exceed the City's Sustainable Building and Site Policy

See the [December 1, 2016 Greenwood Phinney Landbanked Site](#) materials for a good example of concept design presentation.

Schematic Design

At the schematic design phase, it should be clear how the design has evolved from the initial concept. The review occurs when you anticipate only minor changes to the program and the choice of project elements. At this point, the elements and details will be under design, and you will present the proposed choices for materials, plant palettes, site furnishings, and lighting. You will have worked with the artist and should present how the art is being integrated with the building and/or site concept.

At the schematic design phase, the Commission evaluates and makes recommendations on:

- Progress toward achieving the vision and concept for the project
- Response to previous Commission recommendations
- Shifts and refinements to the overarching design concept
- Any changes to scope and program
- Resolution of issues with and refined design response to site conditions, constraints, and opportunities
- Any refinements of preferred approaches to sustainability, including initial analysis on meeting or exceeding project goals
- Refined integration with the urban fabric
- Refinements to sizing and configuration of site program elements and circulation
- Refinements to sizing and configuration of building uses, scale, massing, and orientation
- Character and experiential qualities of buildings and spaces
- Art integration based on art concept design
- Lighting concept
- Any changes in the program or design due to additional community engagement related to the Commission's equity policy or the City's RSJI program

See the [April 3, 2014 Waterfront - Union St](#) materials for a good example of a schematic design presentation.

Design Development

Design Development review occurs when you have refined the schematic design, resolved most issues, and selected design details, materials, and finishes.

In this final phase, the Commission reviews the integration of all aspects of the project. The Commission expects to see final materials and finishes, plant selections, furnishings, and lighting. At this point you will have decided on all sustainability features, and engineers on your team may present key systems and technologies of the overall sustainability strategy, including stormwater management, on-site energy generation, geothermal heating, or rainwater harvesting.

The artist's work will be well underway at this phase, and the Commission will review its integration within the project. Commissioners will consider if the architecture has contributed to the integration of the art in the overall design.

At the design development phase, the Commission evaluates and makes recommendations on:

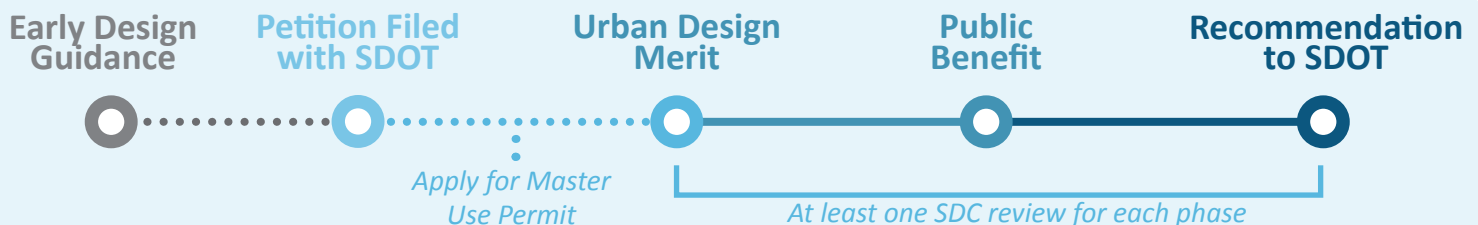
- A summary of how the design achieves the vision and concept for the project
- Response to previous Commission recommendations
- Shifts and refinements to the schematic design
- Final design details of all project elements and spaces
- Choice of site furnishings and lighting
- Materials, colors, and finishes
- Art integration
- Final approach and implementation of sustainability measures in building and site design

See the [January 21, 2016 North Precinct](#) materials for a good example of a design development presentation.

STREET AND ALLEY VACATIONS

The Commission provides recommendations to City Council on a petition to vacate a street or an alley. The Commission develops their recommendations in two distinct phases: Urban Design Merit and Public Benefit.

The Commission forwards its recommendations to Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) as part of the Vacation Petition process. The goal of the Commission's review is to provide clear recommendations to SDOT and City Council about whether the request to vacate a street or alley should be approved and what kind of public benefits should be provided to offset the public loss of the street or alley.



The Commission relies on a variety of documents and information, including:

- City Council's street and alley vacation policies adopted by Resolution 30702, including any amendments
- The documents in the vacation petition
- The documents in the application for Commission review and any presentation materials
- Permitting documents submitted to Seattle Department of Construction & Inspections (SDCI), including street- or

alley-related impact analyses or reports

For further information please review the summary of existing codes and policies that guide the Commission in its review of proposals to vacate an existing street or alley.

Urban Design Merit

During the Urban Design Merit phase, the Commission determines if and how the vacation affects the remaining streets or alleys near the project and if any impacts to the public trust functions have been adequately addressed. The City's streets and alleys are held in public trust for the public. The public trust functions include vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian circulation; access; utilities; light, air, and open space; and views.

The Commission will also consider how the vacation affects adjacent land uses, including whether the loss of the street or alley results in development on a lot that is out of scale compared to development in the immediate area or alters development patterns that predominate in the immediate area.

Your urban design merit presentation should include all items outlined in the Getting Started section as well as:

- Neighborhood circulation (pedestrians, bicycles, transit, and vehicles) with and without vacation
- Building and site circulation with and without vacation
- Programming elements with and without vacation
- Open space with and without vacation
- Utility plans with and without vacation

Once the Commission has completed this phase of the review, they will vote on its recommendation and may add clarifying comments or conditions of approval.

See the [May 4, 2017 1101 8th Ave Alley Vacation](#) materials for a good example of an urban design merit presentation.

Public Benefit

When you request a vacation, you must develop a proposal that provides public benefits that offset the public loss of the street or alley. Public benefits should be proportional to the benefits gained by the applicant because of the vacation, including added property value or development potential. These benefits must go beyond any project elements required by City codes or required to mitigate project impacts. The development and its economic impacts are not public benefits.

The public benefits may occur on the right-of-way surrounding the project, or nearby the vacation site, and may include:

- Publicly accessible plazas or open spaces that are created or enhanced
- Sidewalks wider than required by regulations
- Pedestrian connections
- Enhanced landscaping
- Street elements including seating, lighting, or art
- View easements or corridors
- Wayfinding improvements

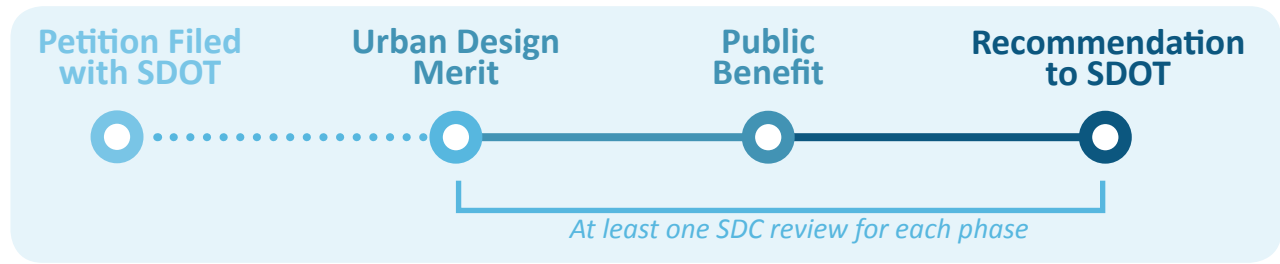
The Commission will also require you to provide a summary of the approach towards equity, as reflected in the Commission's equity policy, in the design of public benefits.

The Commission will vote on its recommendation and may add clarifying comments or conditions of approval.

See the [February 19, 2015 Denny Substation](#) materials for a good example of a public benefit presentation.

SKYBRIDGES

Like street and alley vacations, the Commission advises City Council on petitions for new skybridges or for reauthorizing existing skybridges. Following the process for street or alley vacations, the Commission develops their recommendation based on the merit of the proposal and the public benefit. The Commission makes their recommendations following submittal of an application to the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) and recommendations from the City's Skybridge Review Committee.



The goal of the Commission's review is to provide clear recommendations to SDOT and City Council about whether the request to approve or retain a skybridge is warranted, given its impacts on the adjacent or nearby rights-of-way, and what kind of public benefits should be provided to offset the impacts of the skybridge on the adjacent rights of way. The Commission relies on a variety of documents and information, including:

- SDOT's Director's Rule and Client Assistance memos
- The application materials
- The documents developed by the Skybridge Review Committee, including their final report
- Permitting documents submitted to SDOT or Seattle Department of Construction & Inspections (SDCI) including street- or alley-related impact analyses or reports

Merit

As part of its review and recommendations, the Commission first considers the merit of either installing or retaining the existing skybridge. The Commission considers the following standards found in SMC 15.64:

- Adequacy of horizontal and vertical clearance
- View blockage
- Interruption or interference with existing streetscape or other street amenities
- Impacts due to reduction of natural light
- Reduction of and effect on pedestrian activity at street level
- Number of pedestrians that currently use the skybridge
- Effect on commerce and enjoyment of neighboring land uses
- Availability of reasonable alternatives
- Effect on traffic and pedestrian safety
- Accessibility for the elderly and handicapped

In addition, when evaluating requests to reauthorize an existing skybridge, the Commission will also consider:

- Changed conditions in the vicinity since original installation
- Any changes to existing public benefit mitigation elements provided under the original City Council ordinance that authorised the skybridge
- Any known conflicts with existing or proposed utilities, street lighting, traffic control devices, or other upcoming transportation projects

Once the Commission has completed this phase of the review, they will vote and may add clarifying comments or conditions of approval in its final report to SDOT and City Council.

Public Benefit

A public benefit package is required to offset the impacts to the right of way because of the skybridge. Like street or alley vacations, the public benefit package must exceed any project elements that are either required by City codes or required to mitigate project impacts.

The public benefits should generally be designed to enhance the adjacent and nearby rights-of-way that are impacted by the skybridge. Consistent with public benefits provided under a street or alley vacation, such public benefits can include:

- Creation or enhancement of publicly accessible plazas or open spaces
- Sidewalks wider than required by regulations
- Pedestrian connections
- Enhanced landscaping
- Street elements including seating, lighting, or art
- View easements or corridors
- Wayfinding improvements

The Commission will also require you to provide a summary of the approach towards equity, as reflected in the Commission's equity policy, in the design of public benefits.

The Commission will vote on its recommendation and may add clarifying comments or conditions of approval.

3. PRESENTATION GUIDELINES

Once you have had an initial meeting with Commission staff, you can schedule a Commission review. Every presentation to the Commission should adhere to the following guidelines:

Formatting

1. Number every slide.
2. Ensure all text is at least size 11 font. Keep in mind Commissioners primarily view your materials as a presentation, not as a packet.
3. Ensure all images and photographs are at least 1600 x 1200 pixels and ideally 2048 x 1536 so they do not degrade when printed or enlarged.
4. Ensure all maps and plans contain a north arrow, legend, and scale bar.
5. Ensure all elevations and site plans have dimensions for all relevant project elements.

Saving

1. Save the presentation as a single PDF. Do not submit a PowerPoint file or split into multiple PDF files.
2. Do not convert the PDF to black and white or grayscale.
3. Reduce the file size without compromising its legibility on screen and in print. A good way to do this is with Adobe Acrobat Professional's "PDF Optimizer" tool (File / Save As / Optimized PDF). As a reference, 40 pages should not exceed 20 MB.
4. If you are scanning documents to create your preview materials, set your scanner to a sampling rate/resolution of at least 300 dpi.

Submitting

1. To reduce paper usage, submit your presentation materials electronically to Commission staff. Staff will inform you if any handouts or copies are required for the meeting.
2. If you have any technical or formatting questions, contact SDC_Administration@seattle.gov
3. Refer to the timeline on page 1 for submittal due dates.